



UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA

# IFAS EXTENSION

## Friday's Feature

By

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### **Tis the season to choose a Christmas Tree**

For many families, the selection and purchase of a Christmas tree is an annual tradition. Indeed, bringing home the tree often signals the official start of the holiday season.

With today's live-tree market, healthy, fresh and fragrant Christmas trees are abundant and available to anyone who wishes to have a real tree. To ensure its beauty this Christmas, take extra care in selecting, preparing and decorating your real tree.

When choosing a cut tree, select one with good needle holding ability. Scotch and white pine and Douglas and Balsam fir have naturally good needle-holding qualities, while spruce trees tend to lose needles quickly.

You should always check for freshness of trees on retail lots. The length of time since cutting and the way the trees have been handled can greatly influence how well they will hold their needles and fragrance once they are put up in the home.

Before purchasing, do a freshness test. Hold a branch about six inches from the tip. Pull your hand toward the tip, allowing the branch to slip through your fingers. Very few green needles should come off in your hand if the tree is fresh. Another way to test for freshness is to lift the tree a couple of inches off the ground, then bring it down abruptly on the stump end. If more than a few needles drop, the tree is not fresh.



When you get the tree home, make a fresh cut across the base of the trunk approximately three inches up from the original cut. When a tree is first cut, a seal of sap occurs naturally over its stump which keeps moisture in the tree. It's important to break that seal to allow the tree to take up water.

Until you are ready to decorate, place the cut tree in a large bucket of water in a cool, shady place. If the tree must lean against a wall, make sure that you turn it daily to avoid disrupting the shape of the tree.

The most important thing to remember is that real trees need water. A cut tree may absorb a gallon of water in the first day. Thereafter, it can absorb between two pints to a gallon daily. Be sure to check the stand every day and supply fresh water as needed. If the water supply runs out, a seal will form on the cut surface of the tree trunk and a new cut should be made. Overall, a good rule of thumb is to treat a green Christmas tree just like a fresh bouquet of cut flowers.

Make sure your tree is not located near a fireplace, television set, candles, or other source of heat. Place your tree away from household traffic patterns so that there will be no possibility of the tree being knocked over accidentally.

When decorating your tree, make sure all lighting equipment is in good condition and used in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. Always unplug the lights when leaving the room.

When cared for properly, your Christmas tree should be a source of pleasure throughout the holiday season.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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